



# Jerry "Scratch" Daniels

by Bob Mays

Like many young kids who started their racing careers in the 1950s, 15-year-old Jerry Daniels got a taste of the sport behind the wheel of a modified stock car in 1955. The St. Paul, Minnesota, native spent six years wrestling modifieds in the upper Midwest before getting a call to the big leagues of dirt track racing -- sprint cars.

Ted Ready had a solid operation and asked Daniels to take the seat in 1961. Jerry finished second to three-time International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) champ, Pete Folse, in his debut at Lakeside Stadium in Kansas City and the die was cast.

Daniels jumped into the Roger Hegge- and Duane Besse-owned Buick for 1962 and scored his first win in IMCA on August 5 at Hibbing, Minnesota. When 1963 rolled around, the man they called "Scratch" (his brother Don, also a race driver, was nicknamed "Itch"), was tabbed to drive for the powerful WJW Racing Team. WJW stood for Frank Wagner, Les Johnson and John Wilson and their potent Chevy sprinter had already won many races with Jerry Richert, Gordon Woolley and Johnny Rutherford. Daniels won at Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, on August 4, and then blasted the competition at the Minnesota State Fair in St. Paul. At this time, St. Paul commanded the largest crowds (20,000 to 30,000 were not unusual) and the hottest cars in the business. The hottest car of all was the WJW Chevy with Scratch Daniels up; the first three features of the fair had Daniels so far out in front the competition could barely catch a glimpse of the rim-riding Daniels' rooster tails. Scratch finished the year ranked fourth in IMCA behind Woolley, Pete Folse and Johnny White.

It was during this same time that Daniels was racing super-modifieds quite successfully at Knoxville and North Star Speedway in Blaine, Minnesota.

In 1964, Daniels earned the seat of the winningest sprint car in the history of the sport. Hector Honore's Black Deuce had garnered over 400 feature wins and seven IMCA titles since Hiram Hillegass welded it together in the winter of 1952. Not resting on his laurels, Honore decided to replace the Deuce's Offenhauser engine with a Chevy for the 1964 campaign. The team won at Minot, North Dakota (twice); LaCrosse, Wisconsin; Knoxville, Illinois; Wausau, Wisconsin and Spencer, Iowa, but engine problems stopped them in some key events, dropping them to third in the final standings behind Richert and Jim McCune.

Daniels jumped back to the WJW team in 1965, and along with teammate, Jerry Richert, set his sights firmly on the United States Auto Club (USAC). Scratch had some good runs, but couldn't garner any wins. Typical was a Terre Haute, Indiana, event where Daniels went wheel to wheel with Johnny Rutherford for the lead until the engine went sour.

Scratch rejoined IMCA in 1966. Driving the former A.J. Foyt Traco Chevy, now owned by WJW, Daniels scored wins at Winchester, Indiana (twice) and Nashville, Tennessee, all paved tracks. A fourth place finish in the IMCA rundown was the result.

Daniels got off a lightning fast start in 1967 by winning the Winternationals championship, which consisted of the five-race series at the Florida State Fair in Tampa. This batch of races provided the traditional start to the IMCA season since World War II and, because most of the country is still under a blanket of snow, the Winternationals always drew the best racers from across the United States.

Some of the names pre-entered were Gordon Woolley (Texas); Armond Holley (Georgia); Don Thomas, Dick Fries and Bruce Walkup (California); Rollie Beale, Lou Blaney and Don Hewitt (Ohio); Jay Woodside, Ray Lee Goodwin and Bill Utz (Missouri); Don Mack and Jerry Richert (Minnesota); Dick Gaines (Indiana); Tom Bigelow (Wisconsin); Jerry Blundy (Illinois); Bobbie Adamson, Gus Linder and Ray Tilley (Pennsylvania); and Pete Folse (Florida) along with over forty other throttle jockeys. Daniels started the meet with a fourth place and a third in the first two races, and then swept the final three features of the fair to take home the big trophy.

Daniels decided it was time to give USAC another try and powered his Wagner and Johnson Chevy to a win at Winchester, which was quickly becoming his favorite track. He soon switched to the Colvin and Shepherd Chevy, wrenched by the legendary Don Shepherd. Together they finished eighth in the final USAC sprint car standings for 1967.

The year 1968 was tumultuous for Daniels, to say the least. On the good side, he once again showed his mastery of high banks asphalt tracks by winning on Salem, Indiana's hills, along with second place finishes at Cincinnati, Terre Haute and Knoxville. On the bad side, he had a very public falling out with his car owners Jack Colvin and Don Shepherd. While running third with no brakes late in the season at Terre Haute, Daniels was playing it somewhat conservative much to the displeasure of Shepherd. When Daniels pulled the ailing car into the pits he promptly got an earful from the hot-headed Shepherd. Scratch delivered his rebuttal squarely to Shepherd's nose, much to the delight of the huge crowd. About the time Colvin was joining the festivities, the authorities jumped in and order was restored.

Daniels decided this was probably a good time to seek other employment opportunities within USAC for the remainder of 1968 and once again finished eighth in the final rundown. He also ran some dirt championship car races with an eighth at DuQuoin, driving for "Boston" Louie Seymour, his best effort.

Scratch climbed aboard the Ray and Cissy Smith Chevy for the opening USAC race of 1969 at Reading, Pennsylvania, and rode the rim to a great victory. Later in the year, Daniels had a fine third place in Seymour's dirt champ car behind Mario Andretti and Billy Vukovich at Nazareth, Pennsylvania. Despite the good runs, Daniels was not having as much fun as previous years. When his brother, Itch, was badly injured in an IMCA race in Huron, South Dakota, on Labor Day, Scratch made the decision to call it quits. It was a decision he never regretted.

Daniels drove for some of the top owners in the business, winning at such legendary speed plants as St. Paul, Knoxville, Tampa and Nashville, and he dominated on the hills of Winchester and Salem against the top talent of the day. During one of the most dangerous periods in the history of sprint car racing, Jerry "Scratch" Daniels rode the rim for 15-plus years... with nary a scratch!